



U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

State Department and the Broadcasting Board of Governors Expand Efforts in the Middle East but Face Significant Challenges

Highlights of [GAO-04-435T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations; Committee on Government Reform; House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were a dramatic reminder of the importance of our need to cultivate a better public opinion of the United States abroad. Yet recent opinion research indicates that foreign publics, especially in countries with large Muslim populations, view the United States unfavorably. GAO issued two studies in 2003 that examined changes in U.S. public diplomacy resources and programs since September 11 within the State Department (State) and the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG); the U.S. government's strategies for its public diplomacy programs and how it measures their effectiveness; and the challenges that remain in executing U.S. public diplomacy efforts. Although the studies did not focus exclusively on the Middle East, they identified systemic problems that would apply to public diplomacy activities there.

GAO made several recommendations to State and the BBG to address planning and performance issues. For example, GAO recommended that State develop a strategy to integrate its public diplomacy efforts and direct them toward common measurable objectives, and that BBG revise its strategic plan to include key measurable objectives. Both agencies have made some progress toward implementing our recommendations.

What GAO Found

Since September 11, State has expanded its public diplomacy efforts in Muslim-majority countries considered to be of strategic importance in the war on terrorism. It significantly increased resources in South Asia and the Near East and launched new initiatives targeting broader, younger audiences—particularly in predominantly Muslim countries. Also since September 11, the BBG has initiated several new programs focused on attracting larger audiences in priority markets, including Radio Sawa and Arabic language television in the Middle East, the Afghanistan Radio Network, and Radio Farda in Iran.

State and BBG have increased their efforts to support the war on terrorism. However, State does not have a strategy that integrates all of its diverse public diplomacy activities and directs them toward common objectives. In addition, we found that while the BBG did have a strategic plan, the plan lacked a long-term strategic goal or related program objective to gauge the Board's success in increasing audience size, the key focus of its plan. Furthermore, there is no interagency strategy to guide State's, BBG's, and all federal agencies' communication efforts and thus ensure consistent messages to overseas audiences. In addition to strategy deficiencies, we found that State and the BBG were not systematically and comprehensively measuring progress toward the goals of reaching broader audiences and increasing publics' understanding about the United States.

In addition to weaknesses in planning and performance measurement, State and BBG face several internal challenges in carrying out their programs. Challenges at State include insufficient public diplomacy resources and a lack of officers with foreign language proficiency. The BBG also faces a number of media market, organizational, and resource challenges that may hamper its efforts to generate large audiences in priority markets.

Public Opinion of the United States in Selected Muslim-majority Countries (percent favorable view)

Countries	1999/2000	Summer 2002	Spring 2003
Morocco	77%	*	27%
Lebanon	*	35	27
Indonesia	75	61	15
Turkey	52	30	15
Pakistan	23	10	13
Jordan	*	25	1

Source: GAO, developed from The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press information.

*=no data available

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-435T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess T. Ford at (202) 512-4128 or fordj@gao.gov.